

BULLETIN OF THE TASMANIAN FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB INC.

June 1997
Editor Andrew Walsh

Number 286

The Tasmanian Field Naturalists Club Inc. encourages the study of natural history and supports conservation. We issue our journal *The Tasmanian Naturalist* annually in October. People with a range of backgrounds and knowledge are welcome as members.

Contact Genevieve Gates (03 6227 8638) for further information, or write to GPO Box 68A Hobart 7001

PROGRAM

General meetings start at 7:45pm on the first Thursday of the month in the Life Sciences Building at the University of Tasmania. Outings are usually held the following weekend, meeting at 10am outside the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery entrance, Macquarie St. *If you are planning to attend an outing but not the meeting prior, check as to the timing of the excursion as sometimes unforeseen changes occur.*

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| 5 June | Tony Koslow, CSIRO. Sea mounts of Tasmania, their ecology, fisheries potential and conservation |
| 7 Jun (Sat) | Walk to be decided at Jun 5th meeting. |
| 3 Jul | Jeff Copson. Feral Cats |
| 6 Jul (Sun) | Millipede & centipede collecting trip to Forestier Peninsula. Further details at Jul 3rd meeting. |
| 7 Aug | Leon Barmuta, University of Tasmania. Aquatic invertebrates. |
| 9 Aug (Sat) | Walk to be decided at Aug 9th meeting. |

4 Sep (not confirmed) George Creswell, CSIRO. Ocean currents around Tasmania and the life cycle of marine creatures. This talk might be held at the CSIRO Marine Laboratories, see September bulletin issue for further news.

Tasmanian Marine Naturalist Association Inc. Program

7 PM in the Brownlow Room, Hampden Community Centre 84 Hampden Rd, Battery Point

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| May 14th | Christine Crawford DPIF
Outline of her program on developing methods for environmental monitoring of fish farms |
| June 11th | Martin Riddel Antarctic Division
Discussion of the human impact on the fragile Antarctic environment |
| July 9th | Louise Goggin CRIMP
What is the status of the introduced Pacific Seastar in the River Derwent and what is being done to prevent further introductions into our waters? |
| August 13th | Harry Burton Antarctic Division
All about seals |

Letters

From the Society for Growing Australian Plants Tasmanian Region Inc., Hobart District Group.

The Wildflower Committee has asked me to write to your club and thank you for the wonderful display you organised for our recent flower show. All agreed that it certainly fulfilled our pre-show request to be stimulating, visually exciting and informative. It was a first class display.

The date for our next show, 11th to 16th November 1988, has been pencilled in. We hope you may be interested in joining us or that one too. I will write closer to the date with more details.

Jean Taylor
Secretary 1996 Wildflower Spectacular

From Don Hird c/o Trobriand Islands.

Dear Tas Nats all,
Greetings from the humid tropics. All the heat and humidity can be trying, but they've been amongst the smallest of our concerns so far.

When we arrived here we were presented with several surprises. Our volunteer predecessor had his local family living in the small house provided. Moreover we were all to share the house not for 2-4 weeks, but 'till April. That the four of us would have to live on a single volunteers modest allowance; that there are insect screens on the house, just several missing or inoperative; that there is a lot of petty crime here; etc. etc.

This pressure cooker couldn't last. They left to have a new baby in a PNG mainland hospital two weeks back, though the baby arrived on the two day boat journey. Although it doesn't necessarily take two to be troppo, I didn't take too kindly to all this. Mostly this involves learning the project details for myself, very little documented, horticulturally or otherwise.

Other aspects of life here are not easy either. Of our five weeks so far we have had one with the daily electricity ration of four hours 1800-2200. Food familiar to Australians kids is in limited range, supply and is expensive. Hally has just discovered sweet potato though and we hope to wean them on to other local Kai Kai. Kids love to swim in a pool 20m from here.

One the brighter side, fruit is usually good especially bananas and coconuts, also pineapples, paw-paws, and mangoes just finished. Local subsistence vegetables like yams, taro etc. are OK but fairly subtle. Lots of fish, large edible crabs and some crayfish on the local menu.

In Moresby I purchased "Birds of New Guinea". It's a bit frustrating on these islands on the fringe that have only a fraction of the mainland quotient. Nonetheless, one day while pumping the water to the house I saw a flock of frigate birds. The most prominent bird around the house area is the hooded butcher bird which calls from the coconut palms at dawn and dusk. Metallic starlings have a colony of suspend nests in several school grounds; they also undertake massed flights late afternoon, just like Hobart. Eclectus parrots and black-capped lorries can be seen occasionally, especially in the remnants of rainforest. One of the species of any sort that is common to both here and Tas is the white-bellied sea eagle, of which I've seen one of so far.

Jacinta and Luis have been back in Tas this last week as Jac's father is gravely ill. More to follow, curfew beckons.

Best Regards
Don Hird

1997 Committee

Our new committee for 1997 was formed at the AGM in March. They are as follows:

President - Kevin Bonham

Vice President - Patti Virtue

Secretary - Julia Scott

Treasurer - John Reid

Tasmanian Naturalist Editor - Rob Taylor

Bulletin Editor - Andrew Walsh

Walks & Talks - Amanda Thomson

General Committee - Genevieve Gates

General Committee - Starola Jacka

General Committee - Jim Paterson

General Committee - Kylie McKendrick

The Understorey Network story

At Aprils Field Nats meeting, Els Hayward gave us an interesting lecture all about The Understorey Network. The following is a summary of her address and explains the great work her people do.

The idea of an Understorey Network formed two and a half years ago when Alan Gray (Greening Australia) and Biz Nicholson (national Landcare award winner and landowner) felt that there was a need for more focus on understorey plants as opposed to the heavy use of trees in revegetation projects.

The understorey, which includes shrubs, small trees, grasses, orchids, lichens, mosses, and fungi, prevent erosion, improve soil fertility and water quality, and in primary production, can provide habitat for natural predators that assist in the control of pest species. Els and Biz visited a group called Trees for Life in Adelaide. This 1000 member organisation aims to encourage natural revegetation by using city based volunteers to grow plants for farmers. They provided advice on seed collecting, databasing, attracting membership and funding, etc.

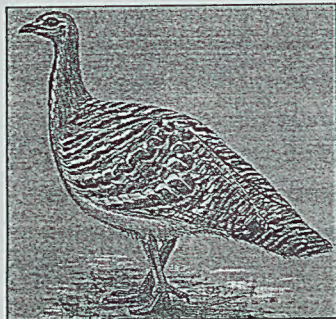
Upon return, a series of meetings and formation of a steering committee saw a Landcare Grant provided 18 months ago to set up the network and employ a coordinator, Anna Povey, who is based in Launceston. Today the membership is up to 200 and still growing. After paying a \$15 joining fee, members are entitled to receive free propagation materials and assistance to grow 250 plants. They are issued with seed and on a particular day in December, are asked to sew their seeds, directly into pots to avoid pricking out later.

When the seedlings are ready for planting out, they are sent to property owners or Landcare groups or planted by the volunteers on their own land (although urban based growers usually grow for rural landowners). Members can also participate in the collection of seed, assist in office duties, propagation research, plant identification, databasing, or education and promotional activities.

Membership forms can be obtained at Field Nats meetings each month, or contact The Coordinator, The Understorey Network, 19 Gorge Rd, Trevallyn, 7250.

Megapodes: Serious adventures for science and conservation

Dr. Darryl Jones from the Megapode Specialist Group, Griffith University Queensland, is organising the Third International Megapode Symposium later this year (6-8 Dec 1997) at the Little Desert Lodge, Nhill Victoria.



The Malleefowl (*Leipoa ocellata*), common around Little Desert Lodge, Nhill Victoria, location for the 3rd International Megapode Symposium later this year. (Picture from Simpson & Day's CD Birds of Australia)

The third IMS brings together the worlds foremost authorities to discuss the latest findings, ideas and issues in Megapode conservation, taxonomy and relationships, interactions with humans, ecophysiology, evolution, and natural history on this unique family of birds.

This year they will emphasise the personal experiences and adventures of those involved in studying these birds in some of the exciting and remote regions of the world. Speakers from the USA, Europe, Indonesia, Oceania and Australia will be attending, with plenty of stories and slides.

Registration is \$50, or \$25 for students and concessions. Accommodation including meals and entertainment is \$130 per day.

For information and application form contact
Dr Darryl Jones
Faculty of Environmental Sciences
Griffith University Nathan Qld 4111
Ph: 07 3875 7451
Fax: 07 3875 7459
e-mail D.Jones@ens.gu.edu.au

The Megapode Specialist Group is affiliated with Word Pheasant Association and Birdlife International, and a member of the IUCN Species Survival Commission

Book Review Flight of the Shearwater by Vincent Serventy Kangaroo Press Sydney, 1996 R.R.P. \$19.95

This book is based on the research undertaken by Dr. Dominic Serventy (the author's elder brother) from 1949 until his death in 1988. From this time on the author continued to make observations and record them. These two gentlemen have been recognised universally as specialised ornithologists with particular knowledge of the Short-tailed Shearwater, or Tasmanian Muttonbird as it is commonly known, and this book is recommended as a simple record of a long-living and well-known species which has special interest to Tasmanians.

I was fortunately able to spend two separate periods of a fortnight each with both Serventys on Fisher Island during their investigation.

L. E. Wall

Timelines Australia Project

The Timelines Australia Project is compiling a nationwide database of natural events eg. plant blossoming, animal breeding and weather patterns, to become the basis for re-establishing the local calendars which Aboriginal people developed over thousands of years.

For bureaucratic reasons, Australia decided to begin each three month season at the start of each corresponding month. The European calendar of four equal seasons is inappropriate for northern Australia and only roughly matches the seasons of southern Australia. A basic pattern of six seasons based on wet and dry is widely recognised for northern Australia, while most Aboriginal calendars have between five to seven seasons. While many tribal calendars in northern Australia are still in use, many southern calendars have been lost.

You can contribute to this project in Tasmania by recording your local plant and animal behaviour along with the date and location and sending it to the Tasmanian Environment Centre. 102 Bathurst St. Hobart, 7000.

Tamar Island Wetlands Sun 8 March 1997 by Sue Collier

A small group of Tas Field Nats visited the Tamar Island wetlands on our way home from the Federation meeting at Paper Beach.

Tamar Island is an area of approximately 60ha, situated in the upper reaches of the Tamar estuary accessed from near Legana on the West Tamar Highway. There is a walk of about 4km return mostly on boardwalks with good views of the wildlife sanctuary. The facilities are excellent including BBQ (gas, though you would have to carry and eski etc.) and toilets. Currently there is one bird hide but we were told that there are plans to extend the boardwalk and construct several more hides. The wetlands are managed by the Parks & Wildlife Service and are open Wed & Sun 12pm-6pm with extended hours during summer. A \$2 entry fee is charged. In our opinion it was well worth visiting and recommended if you are passing along the West Tamar Highway. It's best to allow at least a couple of hours and take your binoculars. More information is available by phoning PWS on 019 971 213 or 03 6336 2678. The birds we saw included the White-bellied Sea Eagle, Australasian Shoveller, Chestnut Teal, Pacific Black Duck, Wood Duck, Great Egret, Black-fronted Dotterel, White-fronted Chat, Purple Swamphen, and Crested Tern.

Centipedes and Millipedes are beautiful but....



much to little appreciated. To rectify this problem, Bob Mesibov from The Queen Victoria Museum wants specimens sent to him for identifying and databasing. They will be deposited at the museum if not required elsewhere. It's vital for databasing that he also receives a grid referenced (or potentially grid-referenceable) locality, a collection date and collector name(s). I recently contacted Bob Mesibov and asked him how he would like the specimens collected.

"I prefer grid references specifying each locality as a 100m square, but something like '100m NW of Plover Falls' is OK because I can get the grid reference off

the appropriate map. A pencil or India ink label with this information should accompany all specimens from one locality and should go into the jar or vial containing them (not taped or glued to the outside). A miscellaneous lot of specimens from more than one locality on more than one date (eg. 'Maria Island, May 1996') is just about useless for myriapod record-keeping. Tasmania is now well-covered by 1:25 000 and 1:100 000 maps, and field naturalists can have very few excuses these days for sloppy biological recording."

"Put centipedes and millipedes into 80% alcohol in the field. They can also be collected live and pickled later. Lab-grade ethyl alcohol and tap water is usually used, but methylated spirits and isopropyl alcohol are fine for short-term storage. Leave the freshly pickled specimens to 'harden' for a few days before transferring to fresh 80% alcohol."

"Spirostreptidan millipedes (see illustration below) are black, pencil-shaped creatures which give off pungent-smelling yellow secretions when disturbed. These secretions can stain other millipedes and for this reason spirostreptidans should be separately stored. To avoid mechanical damage to smaller myriapods, pill millipedes (the black, roll-up forms) should also be stored and shipped separately."

"Ship the specimens in small, tightly closed containers well-sealed in plastic bags and cushioned by packing. Fill the containers completely with alcohol and/or cotton wool to prevent damage to specimens by sloshing of liquid during shipment."

Send them to Bob Mesibov, Research Associate, QVMAG Wellington St. Launceston 7250.

Drawings courtesy of Bob Mesibov.



Note: On Jul 6th (Sun) the club is conducting a millipede & centipede collecting trip to Forestier Peninsula. Further details at Jul 3rd meeting.

Animals & Plants Threatened by Declining Water Quality

Peter McGlone, the Tasmanian Coordinator of the Threatened Species Network (TSN), has sent us some information regarding a submission the TSN and the Tasmanian Conservation Trust (TCT) presented to the Sustainable Development Advisory Council on the draft State Policy on Water Quality Management in February.

Further details can be obtained by contacting the TSN, but below are a few of their concerns. A total of 127 species listed on the State Threatened Species Protection Act are threatened in part or entirely by changes in water quality. There are an additional 73 riparian or aquatic species, not on the State Act, that are rare and potentially threatened by habitat change. Also, 21 of 26 riparian vegetation communities identified for the Midlands and eastern Tasmania are unreserved (ie. 8) or poorly reserved (ie. 13).

In the Midlands and eastern Tasmania, prime threats to riparian vegetation are land clearance, grazing, forestry operations, fire, introduced species, removal of stream debris, and, in some instances, rehabilitation activities. Inundation and changes to water flows for hydro-power production are clearly a threat in other regions of the state.

The State Threatened Species Protection Act, if given sufficient funding, will provide an adequate mechanism for rescuing species from the effects of past mismanagement, particularly where landholders and industries are cooperative. The difficult part, where the legislation is not strong enough, will be in changing the practices of industries such as forestry, farming, hydro and mining. For further information, contact the Threatened Species Network C/ Tasmanian Conservation Trust, 102 Bathurst St. Hobart 7000 Ph. 03623 43552 Fax. 03623 12491 e-mail tsntas@ozemail.com.au

New Bulletin editor

Mail your bulletin contributions to Andrew Walsh at 146 Misty Hill Rd Mountain River, 7109
e-mail
Andrew.Walsh@forestry.tas.gov.au